

Opening address - President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola - 18 January 2022
original version

(English translation of Maltese original)

Members of the European Parliament,
Colleagues,
Europeans,

I am humbled and honoured by the responsibility you have entrusted to me. I promise that I will put all my energy into working for this Parliament and for the good of all European citizens.

(English translation of Italian original)

The first thing I'd like to do as President is to take up David Sassoli's legacy. David was someone who fought for Europe, for us and for this Parliament. He believed that Europe had the power to forge a new path in this world. Thank you, David.

(English original)

I will honour David Sassoli as President by always, standing up for Europe. For our common values of democracy, dignity, justice, solidarity, equality, rule of law and fundamental rights.

For the politics of hope and the promise of the European Union. I want people to recapture a sense of belief and enthusiasm for our project. A belief to make our shared space safer, fairer, more just and more equal.

Dear Europeans,

In the next years, people across Europe will look to our institution for leadership and direction, while others will continue to test the limits of our democratic values and European principles.

We must fight back against the anti-EU narrative that takes hold so easily and so quickly.

Disinformation and misinformation, further amplified during the pandemic, fuels easy cynicism and cheap solutions of nationalism, authoritarianism, protectionism, isolationism. These are a false illusion offering no solutions.

Europe is about precisely the opposite. It is about all of us standing up for one another, bringing our people closer together. It is about all of us defending those principles of our founding mothers and fathers that led us from the ashes of war and holocaust to peace, to hope, to prosperity.

Honourable Members,

Our House matters.

- It matters to our judges under attack, to health care frontliners under pressure; to every woman in our Union still fighting for her rights; to the vulnerable; to the oppressed and the abused.
- It matters to those forced to flee natural disasters; to the families of those killed in terror attacks; to our armed forces and law enforcement serving under difficult conditions; to those seeking protection; to our farmers, NGOs and entrepreneurs;
- It matters; to our LGBTIQ communities; to those still discriminated against because of their religion, skin colour or gender identity; to all those who believe in the promise of Europe.

This House matters - and when people look to us to defend our values they will find an ally.

Dear Colleagues,

My generation sees no old and no new Europe. We are the first of the Erasmus generation, the last of the Wałęsa, and Havel generation. We understand that equality of opportunity is different from making everyone the same. We celebrate differences in Europe - because we know that is what makes us stronger. What makes us unique. What makes us European.

We know that if people are to look to Europe with confidence, we must burst through the Strasbourg and Brussels bubble to bring Europe, its ideals and decisions, to people in different towns and villages across Europe.

(English translation of French original)

‘Everyone on our planet would feel better if the strong voice of Europe could be heard.’ This is what President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing said in his introductory speech to the Convention on the Future of Europe in 2002.

(English original)

Already then, the call for stronger Europe existed. We must now ensure that the Conference on the Future of Europe has the support it needs to ensure concrete outcomes. Especially, we must listen to our youth on this year dedicated to them.

Dear fellow Europeans,

Climate change is ravaging our continent and our world - it is no longer a problem for another generation to deal with. If you believe science, and this House does, the question is no longer if, but when.

The European Green Deal and the pledge to be the first carbon free continent is the right answer. This is not only a necessity and an urgency, it is also an opportunity for Europe to take the lead, to re-invent itself, to ensure growth, sustainability and prosperity, while reducing emissions.

We must impress on the rest of the world that the fight against climate change is a common destiny.

Tomorrow is too late.

And we must continue to show that you cannot decouple the environment and the economy.

Businesses from start-ups and SMEs to larger corporations across our Union require legal certainty, easier access to funding, and an innovative spirit and environment in Europe. They need less bureaucracy and more chances to take the risks that will see Europe regain its competitive edge. The Recovery and Resilience Fund will help our investment to relaunch after the pandemic.

Like the green transition, the digital transformation creates opportunities. We need to be in the forefront of these changes and steer them. And we will.

Our European way of open economies and open societies is a model I am proud of. It is a model that must be given support to withstand the pressure it comes under. Pressure to look inwards, erect new barriers, put up old borders and abandon our shared Schengen space - a space we have a duty to complete - or any attempt to discredit our values and principles.

Konrad Adenauer said, 'European unity was a dream of a few. It became a hope for the many. Today it is a necessity for all of us.'

Dear Colleagues,

The world around us is less friendly than it was a generation ago. The unacceptable attacks on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the dangerous situation in Belarus are prime examples of this. Our collective security is a common challenge.

For the European Union to remain credible and exert its influence globally, we have to remain principled. This is our true strength. For autocrats and despots the EU is a threat, simply by existing. As Tarek Osman put it so eloquently: 'Europe has after all curated the most beautiful, refined way of living humanity has ever known.'

(English translation of French original)

This year marks 70 years of our presence in Strasbourg. A city, a region, whose location represents the separation of powers and therefore offers a guarantee of democracy. It means our Parliament embodies an institution that is open and accessible to people and at their service. All this makes it an obvious place for our institution.

(English original)

Europe has a legacy of war, but also of healing. We can put this experience to use in helping efforts to end the separation in the European Union's last divided country - Cyprus - under the auspices of the UN plan. We can never be truly whole while Cyprus remains split. We must

also reverse the lost momentum when it comes to our relationship with the Western Balkans.

Dear Members,

Let me be clear: to those who seek to destroy Europe, know that this House stands against you.

To those who attempt to undermine democracy, the rule of law, free speech and fundamental rights, who see women as a target, and who deny the rights to our LGBTIQ citizens - know that this House will never accept it.

To those who try to blackmail Europe through hybrid attacks, this Parliament will not weaken solidarity among members - know that dictators will never divide us.

And, let me say, to the families of Daphne Caruana Galizia and Jan Kuciak, journalists killed for doing their job: your fight for truth and justice is our fight. To the loved ones of Olivier Dubois, abducted for almost 300 days in Mali, I say his struggle for freedom must become our struggle.

Friends, Europeans,

The political model that we developed has led our continent to democracy, prosperity and equality. But, if we are to raise Europe to the levels promised to the next generation, we now need to forge something even stronger, something in tune with the times, that motivates a younger, more sceptical audience to believe in Europe.

Ours must be a Parliament that empowers. That is diverse. I know that having the first female President of this House since 1999 matters inside and outside these rooms. But it must go further. Our Institution's commitment to having more diversity, gender equality, guaranteeing women's rights - all our rights - must be reaffirmed.

Twenty-two years ago, Nicole Fontaine was elected 20 years after Simone Veil. It will not be another two decades until the next woman is standing here.

I know I stand on the shoulders of giants. The shoulders of Simone Veil - Auschwitz inmate 78-6-5-1 - who tore off the shackles of that painful part of our European history to blaze a path through ceilings as the first woman to be European Parliament President; the shoulders of the millions of nameless women who endured so much and who fought for us to have the opportunities they were never afforded.

The shoulders of Ashling, Paulina and all the other women whose lives have already been stolen this year. The shoulders of Europe's displaced and the disappeared; on all those who fought and suffered under totalitarianism and sacrificed everything for Europe.

On the shoulders of all those who believed and who believe still.

We stand here thanks to them. We stand here for them.

Europe is back.

Europe is the future.

Vive L'Europe!